About The Dust Bowl



For eight years dust blew on the southern plains. It came in a yellowish-brown haze from the South and in rolling walls of black from the North. The simplest acts of life — breathing, eating a meal, taking a walk — were no longer simple. Children wore dust masks to and from school, women hung wet sheets over windows in a futile attempt to stop the dirt, farmers watched helplessly as their crops blew away.

The Dust Bowl of the 1930s lasted about a decade. Its primary area of impact was on the southern Plains. The northern Plains were not so badly effected, but nonetheless, the drought, windblown dust and agricultural decline were no strangers to the north. In fact the agricultural devastation helped to lengthen the Depression whose effects were felt worldwide. The movement of people on the Plains was also profound.

As John Steinbeck wrote in his 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*: "And then the dispossessed were drawn west- from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas, families, tribes, dusted out, tractored out. Car-loads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless - restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do - to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut - anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land."

Poor agricultural practices and years of sustained drought caused the Dust Bowl. Plains grasslands had been deeply plowed and planted to wheat. During the years when there was adequate rainfall, the land produced bountiful crops. But as the droughts of the early 1930s deepened, the farmers kept plowing and planting and nothing would grow. The ground cover that held the soil in place was gone. The Plains winds whipped across the fields raising billowing clouds of dust to the skys. The skys could darken for days, and even the most well sealed homes could have a thick layer of dust on furniture. In some places the dust would drift like snow, covering farmsteads.

References

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